

A COMMENTARY

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AS RONALD KURTH correctly notes in his response to James Wirtz's article "A Joint Idea: An Antisubmarine Warfare Approach to Theater Missile Defense," many tactical, strategic, and political differences exist between antisubmarine warfare (ASW) and locating and destroying deployed mobile transporter-erector-launchers (TEL). Wirtz's proposal does not reflect some fundamental failure to understand that undersea warfare is different than destroying TELs. Wirtz acknowledges that significant differences exist in applying an ASW approach to both kinds of operations. But Wirtz's point is that an ASW philosophy—a systematic process of analysis and organization of effort—can solve more problems than just finding submarines at sea.

Kurth acknowledges that an ASW approach to the Scud hunt might work, but he suggests that the differences in the two forms of warfare are too great to be bridged. Kurth's reservations center on four issues: (1) state sovereignty limits the possibility of conducting ASW-like operations over land in peacetime; (2) submarines do not shoot back at pursuing aircraft; (3) unlike TELs, submarines have many signatures that can be tracked; and (4) strategists should think of something other than repeating victory in the desert (i.e., the Gulf War syndrome). If these issues are resolved, however, Kurth apparently would be willing to endorse an ASW concept to guide development of an integrated, all-source theater missile defense architecture.

Kurth's first reservation is important: we cannot use overt surveillance involving

penetration of a potential opponent's airspace to track TELs on a day-to-day basis. But conducting these kinds of intrusive operations is not necessary during peacetime. Instead, intelligence analysts can monitor launcher storage areas to estimate the opponent's order of battle and mobilization procedures.

Clandestine, autonomous unmanned air or land vehicles or space-based assets might also watch choke points (e.g., highways or bridges). We might also use existing or specially developed space-based area search sensors to conduct continuous monitoring to detect potential targets. These systems may only be queuing platforms, or they may be capable of providing a near-real-time datum to a platform capable of target localization, classification, and destruction. The National Command Authorities can make the decision to shift to more aggressive operations, perhaps accompanied by appropriate measures against aircraft defenses, either during war or as hostilities appear imminent.

One might be tempted to respond to Kurth's second reservation—that submarines do not fire back at tracking aircraft—with the simple observation that TELs do not fire at attacking aircraft either. It is not clear that opponents will want to advertise the position of their TELs by placing them in easily identified, fortified areas. Opponents might adopt a "bastion" approach to protecting their TELs, much in the same way that the Soviets attempted to protect their fleet ballistic missile submarines during the cold war. But bastions did not stop American ASW efforts; air defenses might only complicate,

but not limit, an ASW approach to hunting TELs. Creating heavily defended areas might even ease the more difficult task of determining the general location of missile launchers.

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Kurth's third reservation that submarines are inherently more observable underwater than TELs are on solid ground fails to acknowledge the variety of potential signatures generated by mobile missile launchers. (Kurth points out that the submarine is foreign to its environment—Admiral Rickover must be rolling over in his grave.) We should exploit all kinds of possible signatures, ranging from the obvious (infrared, electromagnetic, and acoustic) to the not so obvious (seismic, aural, and tire tracks), to hunt for TELs. As Kurth notes, TELs are different from nuclear submarines in that a nuclear-powered submarine does have a continuous, detectable signal source. A TEL's signal is analogous to that of a diesel submarine, which is available only when it is snorkeling and for only very short periods of time. But the TEL, like the diesel submarine, cannot run far from a datum.

Finally, is all of this just a reflection of the Gulf War syndrome? Apparently, Kurth fails to realize that the Scud hunt during Operation Desert Storm was unsuccessful. "Open

areas, desert, air superiority . . . small area, the opponent's relatively backward technology" presented the American military with a problem that remains unresolved. Maybe TELs can be better hidden in the jungles of Vietnam or the hillsides of Yugoslavia; maybe rugged terrain and triple-level jungle canopy will hinder the positioning and movement of TELs. But the fact remains that Iraq demonstrated to a global audience that the United States is ill prepared to deal with the mobile-missile threat. An effective response to the deployment of TELs in desert surroundings is as good a place as any to begin to solve the Scud problem.

During World War II, a group of scientists, mathematicians, and engineers defined methods and systematic processes of analysis that would lead to doctrines which would have widespread application, not only to ASW but also to many other military and civilian problems. To quote from that group of World War II analysts, "It is increasingly evident that no branch of the Service can afford anything less than maximum efficiency in the use of the men and materiel available to it. The realization of this ideal demands that the most advanced scientific knowledge available in the country be focused upon such matters not only in times of war, but especially in times of peace."¹ We have methods and systematic processes of analysis that work; let's adapt them and get on with the show. □

Note

1. Philip M. Morse, "Foreword," in Operations Evaluation Group, Report no. 56, "Search and Screening," 1946.